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FM AMEMBASSY RANGOON
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 7406
INFO RUCNASE/ASEAN MEMBER COLLECTIVE
RUEHGG/UN SECURITY COUNCIL COLLECTIVE
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 1059
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 4607
RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL 8147
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 5708
RHHMUNA/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 3604
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 1462
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 RANGOON 000276

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STATE FOR EAP AND IO; PACOM FOR FPA

E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/20/2017

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [BM](#)

SUBJECT: BURMA'S THINGYAN: IN WITH A SPLASH, OUT WITH A BANG

Classified By: Pol Officer Sean O'Neill for Reasons 1.4 (b) & (d)

SUMMARY

1. (SBU) Witnesses reported isolated instances of referendum campaigning during last week's Thingyan water festival but described the festivities as overwhelmingly free of overt political activity by either side. However, several opposition activists were assaulted and arrested over Thingyan, apparently in retaliation for their referendum positions. On the evening of April 20, two small bombs detonated in downtown Rangoon. No one was hurt and no significant damage was observed. No arrests have been made.

THINGYAN

2. (SBU) Embassy officers, staff, and contacts reported that this year's water festival was typically raucous but overwhelmingly free of overt political campaigning. Despite the presence of thousands of people in the streets for over four days, none of our officers or staff who observed the water festival in Rangoon, Mandalay, and Shan State saw any "vote no" T-shirts or other evidence of an organized opposition campaign. A Rangoon contact did report seeing hand-held signs that read "NO" on one occasion, but could not specify how many he saw or how long they were displayed. A family member of an Embassy staff member reported hearing a small group of men briefly chanting "no, no, no" in the midst of a Thingyan celebration in her Rangoon neighborhood, but described the chanting as short-lived. Another embassy employee, vacationing in Mandalay, saw a number of uniformed SwanAr-Shin standing guard near the centrally-located royal palace. The members of the pro-regime militia wore khaki uniforms bearing shoulder patches that read "people power" but our staff member did not see them interfering with any celebrants or onlookers.

3. (C) A Ministry of Forestry employee told our agricultural specialist that the ministry had given all ministry employees a 60,000 kyat (USD55) Thingyan bonus prior to the water festival. The employee believed the true purpose of the unusually large bonus was to entice the ministry's staff to

vote for the draft constitution, but acknowledged officials did not articulate any such instruction. We are checking with sources at other ministries but so far members of the Ministries of Agriculture, and Livestock and Fisheries reported they did not receive any Thingyan bonus or instructions on how to vote.

ASSAULTS AND ARRESTS

¶4. (C) NLD Spokesman U Nyan Win confirmed several NLD members were assaulted over the Thingyan holiday last week. An unknown number of men attacked NLD youth member Ko Thi Han in Rangoon on April 16 as he rode his bicycle home. He was wearing a "NO" t-shirt at the time. Another Rangoon NLD member, Win Thein, and several members of his family were assaulted while walking home from a bus stop in North Okkalapa township. None of the victims were seriously injured and all are at home resting. NLD officials speculated the regime ordered the attacks in order to intimidate opposition activists.

¶5. (SBU) Authorities arrested NLD member Tin Win on April 15 in Rangoon. The NLD believed he was arrested because authorities suspected him of posting "No" signs on billboards during last week's Thingyan water festival. Authorities have not acknowledged Tin Win's arrest and his family have not heard from him since April 15.

SMALL EXPLOSIONS IN RANGOON

¶6. (C) On the evening of April 20 two small bombs detonated in downtown Rangoon. No one was hurt and no significant

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damage was reported. One explosion took place on a side street behind the Traders Hotel while the other took place in a drainage ditch outside a downtown bar. Based on his inspection of the scene and discussions with witnesses and police, ARSO believed the bombs were small, handmade devices not capable of inflicting serious injury or damage. The ranking police officer on the scene told ARSO the police did not have any suspects and had not received any claims of responsibility, but was nonetheless confident the perpetrators were not targeting foreigners.

COMMENT

¶7. (C) Thingyan has traditionally provided the Burmese people with a one-week escape from the hardships of life under the regime. This year was no exception. Based on what we saw and heard, most Burmese were content to enjoy this time-honored tradition free from politics or protest. The regime similarly did not mar the festivities with any broad-based overt campaign in favor of its draft constitution. Instead, the Than Shwe regime chose to continue its cowardly nighttime attacks on the opposition and those who reject their vision of a "discipline (sic) flourishing democracy."

VILLAROSA